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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the characteristics of Adoption Resource Exchange of America (ARENA) registration in 1969 and 1972 in relation to factors associated with placement. The survey includes 615 children and 1,020 families. Geographically source of registration had little relation to location of placement, with only 13% placed in the state they registered in 1969 and 5% in 1972. Sex characteristics were not a problem as over half of the families did not restrict their choice by sex. Only one-fourth of the families were willing to take older children while one-half of the children registered in 1972 were over five. Over 40% of the families were willing to consider the 30% registered as siblings. Only 8% of the families in 1969 and 19% in 1972 were willing to consider the black and black-white children who constituted 17% (in 1969) and 31% (in 1972) of the registrants. Religion is no problem. Only 10% of the families were willing to consider the 23% of the registrants who were retarded. Five percent of the children registered had irremediable handicaps in 1969 and 11% in 1972. Only 2% of the families were willing to consider them. The study includes a description of characteristics of the applying families. (DJ)

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SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN ARENA

An Analysis of the Relation of Characteristics of Children Registered with ARENA and the Characteristics Acceptable to Families Registered

Conducted under Grant OCD-CB-23
Office of Child Development
U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare

Research Center
Child Welfare League of America

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The Child Welfare League of America submitted to the Office of Child Development a proposal for a four-part project to be conducted in connection with the Adoption Resource Exchange of North America: 1) an analysis of the characteristics of ARENA registrations, with particular attention to the factors associated with difficulty in placement; 2) an attempt to estimate the potential clientele of ARENA through a survey of children in foster care with little prospect of return to their own homes; 3) an analysis of the legal and policy impediments to interstate adoptions; and 4) compilation of descriptive information on effective plans for recruiting adoptive families for the so-called hard-to-place child.

Approval was given to the third activity, analysis of impediments to interstate adoption, and a separate report is in preparation on this endeavor. Enough information was thought to be available already on the characteristics of child and family associated with difficulty in adoptive placement. However, because of the degree of staff interest in analysis of ARENA experience, CWLA obtained permission to use part of the time of the project research assistant on this and to charge certain out-of-pocket costs for the work to the grant. In addition to substantive interest in the data, ARENA staff wished to modify their system for matching families and children from use of McBee Key Sort, a hand method no longer efficient for the large number of registrations now active at any one time, to use of an IBM Counter-Sorter, a simple but much speedier method for identifying registrants with a desired combination of characteristics.

The problem was then to decide what could be done within the very limited resources available for this part of the project. A system was easily developed to enter the necessary information about children and families on IBM cards that could be used for matching particular families and children in day-to-day ARENA operations and for analysis of ARENA clientele and operations. However, it became apparent very quickly that it was not feasible to transfer the data directly from McBee to IBM cards, and that additional information from registration cards was needed. An intermediate step had to be taken of preparing a code sheet from the registration card and registration form for each child and family to be included.

Coding all 5,500 cases known to ARENA would have taken about five months of full time, while the task had been planned to absorb only part of the time of the half-time research assistant. It was decided therefore to focus on 1969 and 1971 registrations, with a view to determining whether ARENA staff impressions of a marked change in clientele were borne out by the data. Registrations in these two years, however, exceeded 3,700. It was then decided to delimit the task further by excluding registrations that had been withdrawn and concentrating on cases in which a placement had been made or which were still active. As may be seen from Table 1, this reduced the study group to 1,635.

Table 1
Total 1969 and 1971 Registrations

Registrations	Children		Families	
	1969	1971	1969	1971
Total registrations	706	688	828	1,505
Status as of April 1, 1972				
Withdrawn	483	296	613	700
Study group	223	392	215	805
Placements	201	172	165	148
Still active	22	220	50	657

Elimination of withdrawals seemed quite logical, since the reason for withdrawal was often unknown and, in any case, the withdrawals were not available for placement through ARENA. However, as may be noted from Table 1, there were much higher proportions of withdrawals of both children and families among the 1969 than the 1971 registrations. This should have been anticipated since both groups were followed to April 1, 1972, by which date the 1969 registrants had had two years longer to withdraw than the 1971 registrants. By the cut-off date roughly three-fourths of the 1969 cases but slightly less than half the 1971 cases had withdrawn. Because of the method of selection of the study cases, relatively little weight can therefore be given to comparison of 1969 and 1971 registrations.

The focus of the report is the relation of the characteristics of the children registered in a given year to the characteristics of children who would be considered by the families who were registered in that year. The report concludes with some descriptive data on the families in the study group.

An important by-product of this analysis was the conversion of the ARENA system for selecting children and families to use of an IBM Counter-Sorter, which is greatly facilitating the day-to-day operations of ARENA.

Total 1969 and 1971 Registrations and Withdrawals up to April 1, 1972

Approximately 700 children were registered with ARENA in each of the study years -- 708 in 1969 and 688 in 1971. Although these children were registered because no suitable home was available locally, 485 of the 1969 group and 296 of the 1971 group had been withdrawn by the cut-off date of the study. It is the remaining 223 children registered in 1969 and 392 registered in 1971 who constitute the study groups. All but 22 of the 1969 children had been placed by April 1, 1972, but 220 of the 1971 children were still awaiting placement on that date.

The number of families registered almost doubled from 1969 to 1971 -- 828 in 1969 and 1,505 in 1971. Withdrawals reduced the study groups for the two years to 215 and 805, respectively. Fifty of the 215

families registered in 1969 and 657 of the 1971 group were still awaiting a child as of April 1, 1972. To the extent that the withdrawals mean that a child has found a home or a family has found a child, the high proportion of withdrawals is gratifying. However, from the point of view of the unproductive use of ARENA staff time and money in processing these registrations, the withdrawals are of some concern.

Most of the children and families in the study group had already been registered with the adoption exchange in their own state or province, if one existed, and relatively few registrations came from localities known to have no formal or informal exchange. However, in a goodly number of cases no information was given on the registration forms about whether or not the case had been registered with the local exchange.

Geographic Source of Registrations and Location of Placements

Table 2 shows the distribution of children and families registered and of placements, by United States Census regions and Canada. The numbers of children and of families registered in 1969 and not withdrawn by April 1, 1972 were almost the same. Only four regions registered more families than children, while for Canada and the other five regions the number of children exceeded that of families.

In 1971 the number of families registered and not withdrawn by April 1, 1972 was more than double the number of children. The excess of families was particularly large in the New England, Middle Atlantic and West North Central regions. However, for three regions and Canada more children than families were registered. The distribution of placements parallels roughly that of families registered.

When the child's residence at time of registration was compared, for the placed children, with the region where he was placed, it was found that in 1969 only 29 children, or 13% of the children placed, were placed in the same region from which they had been registered. In 1971 the number of placements within the region of origin dropped to nine, or 5% of the children placed up to the cut-off point.

The distribution of children registered and of placements was also examined by state and province. Children were registered in one or both years from all states except six (Arkansas, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine and Mississippi), the District of Columbia and four Canadian provinces (Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island). Children were placed in all but eight states (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Mississippi, New Mexico and Oklahoma), and the 10 Canadian provinces.

Five states (Arizona, Maryland, New York, Ohio and Tennessee) and the province of Manitoba each registered more than 25 children, and four states placed more than 25 children (Michigan, Minnesota, New York and Pennsylvania). Only New York appears on both lists. In general the large "sending" states were not large "receiving" states.

Table 2

Regional Distribution of Registrations and of Placements of Children in the Study Group

Region	Registrations								Placements of Children Registered in			
	Children				Families							
	1969		1971		1969		1971		1969		1971	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
New England	2	1	9	2	25	12	100	12	17	8	30	17
Middle Atlantic	33	15	46	12	40	18	238	30	46	23	45	26
East North Central	14	6	54	14	54	25	115	14	41	20	21	12
West North Central	5	2	20	5	40	18	148	18	43	21	32	19
South Atlantic	33	15	52	13	23	11	54	7	26	13	7	4
East South Central	18	8	29	7	10	5	27	3	5	2	3	2
West South Central	8	4	24	6	4	2	10	1	8	4	2	1
Mountain	45	20	51	13	8	4	39	5	7	3	8	5
Pacific	30	13	34	9	10	5	60	7	6	3	21	12
Canada	35	16	73	19	1	*	10	1	1	1	0	-
Foreign	0	-	0	-	0	-	4	1	1	1	3	2
Total	223	100	392	100	215	100	805	100	201	100	172	100

* Less than 0.5%

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Characteristics of Children Registered and of Children Sought by Registered Families

In comparing the characteristics of children awaiting placement and the kinds of children applicant families are willing to consider, it is important to remember that it is not a single characteristic but a combination of characteristics that make a particular child suitable for a particular family. Thus, a family may be quite ready to adopt a physically handicapped child but only if he is unusually bright. Or a family may be interested in adopting a black child but only if he is under 5 years old and free of intellectual and physical handicaps. Consequently, if homes are to be found for every child in ARENA's caseload of hard-to-place children, it is essential for ARENA to have a large pool of families to draw on.

The more flexible a family is about the characteristics of the child it will accept, the more likely it is that a child will be found for that family.

Sex: About two-thirds of the children in the study groups in both years were male (67% in 1969 and 64% in 1971). Although the families showed a slight preference for female children, only about one-fifth would consider only females and a large majority did not restrict their choice to one or the other sex.

Age: Table 3 presents the ages of the children at the time of registration. There was a marked increase from 1969 to 1971 in the proportion of children registered at five years or older. In 1969 only a third were at least five years old, but in 1971 exactly half had reached age five. The proportion 9 years or older rose from 10% to 22%.

As may be seen from the figures at the foot of the table, the number of families willing to take older children was much larger in 1971 than among the much smaller 1969 group. However, the proportion did not increase, and in neither year was the number of families available for older children large enough to absorb the older children registered.

Sibling Groups: In each year approximately 30% of the children in the study were registered as family groups (67 in 1969 and 115 in 1971). The proportion of families willing to consider sibling groups was slightly over 40% in both 1969 and 1971 and the numbers of families (89 and 340) were far in excess of the number of sibling groups available for placement.

Race: There was a marked change in the racial distribution of children registered from 1969 to 1971, as is apparent from Table 4. The proportion of white children was a little over a fourth in both years, but the proportion of children of black or black-white parentage jumped from 17% to 43%. Although the number of children of Indian or Indian-white parentage remained constant, their proportion dropped from 39% to 22%. The children shown as "other" race comprised a

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wide variety of ethnic or cultural backgrounds, including a few each of Oriental, Puerto Rican, Chicano, Alaskan, and various combinations such as black-Indian.)

Table 3

Age of Children Registered in 1969 and 1971
and Families Willing to Consider Older Children

	1969		1971	
Age at Registration	No.	%	No.	%
Under 3 months	20	9	20	5
3 and under 6 months	17	8	24	6
6 and under 12 months	24	11	35	9
1 and under 3 years	49	22	70	18
3 and under 5 years	37	16	46	12
5 and under 7 years	33	15	61	16
7 and under 9 years	20	9	48	12
9 and under 12 years	19	8	67	17
12 years and over	4	2	21	5
Total	223	100	392	100
Median Age	3.0		5.0	
Children 5 and older	76	34	197	50
9 and older	23	10	88	22
Families willing to consider children				
5 and older	58	27	196	24
9 and older	17	8	51	6

Table 4

Race of Children Registered and
Race Acceptable to Adoptive Applicants

	1969		1971	
Race	No.	%	No.	%
White	64	29	109	28
Black	23	10	106	27
White-Black	16	7	62	16
Indian	56	25	60	15
White-Indian	31	14	26	7
Other	33	15	29	7
Total	223	100	392	100
Black or White-Black hildren	39	17	168	43
Indian or White-Indian children	87	39	86	22
Family willing to onsider:				
Black or part-Black	18	8	150	19
Indian or part-Indian	126	59	454	56

Race is the characteristic on which there is the greatest discrepancy between the children available and the children who will be considered by the families registered. About 90% of the adoptive applicants in both years were white. Although some of the white applicants would not accept a white child, and many would consider children of other races, the racial backgrounds acceptable were not those most common among the children registered. Over half the families would consider Indian or part-Indian children, and substantial proportions would accept Oriental, Chicano, Puerto Rican or Alaskan children. However, only 18 of the 1969 families (8%) and 150 of the 1971 families (19%) would consider children of black or part-black parentage. It is

true that the supply of families for black children came closer to the number of black children registered in 1971 than in 1969, but there were still not enough, even if no other factors had to be taken into account in arranging placement.

Religion: Religion in itself does not seem to be an obstacle to adoption among the ARENA registrants. Over half the children were religiously free, and the number of children of Protestant and Catholic background was appreciably smaller than the number of families who planned to raise their adopted children in the Protestant or Catholic religion. More detailed data on this matter are given in Table 5.

Intellectual Potential: The great majority of children in both years were estimated to be average in mental development (81% and 69%), with a small proportion judged to be accelerated in mental development (5% and 7%). An appreciable group were, however, rated as slow, and this group increased very markedly from 1969 to 1971, both in numbers (24 vs. 89) and percentage (11% vs. 23%).

Only about one family in 10 was willing to consider a "slow" child. The number of such families was only 19 in 1969. In 1971 it was 89, exactly the same as the number of slow children registered in that year.

Table 5

Religion of Children and Families

A. Religion of Children Registered

	1969		1971	
Religion	No.	%	No.	%
Religiously free	124	56	206	53
Protestant	67	30	106	27
Catholic	28	12	74	19
Other or Unknown	4	2	6	1
Total	223	100	392	100

B. Religion in Which Child Is to Be Raised

	1969		1971	
Religion	No.	%	No.	%
Protestant	146	68	525	65
Catholic	43	20	173	21
Jewish	6	3	24	3
Other	12	6	28	3
None, flexible or unknown	8	4	55	7
Total	215	101	805	99

Physical Handicap: Well over three-fourths of the children were free of known physical handicaps, as shown in Table 6. In 1969, 14% had a remediable handicap usually correctable without great expense, and 5% had an irremediable handicap. In 1971, the number with irremediable handicaps was much larger (42) and they constituted 11% of the children.

Remediable physical handicaps do not pose a serious problem in placement, particularly if their correction does not entail very costly medical procedures. Over 40% of the families were willing to consider a child with such a handicap. However, the number of families to whom a child with a irremediable handicap was acceptable barely matched the number of children with such handicaps in the 1969 group. Fortunately, a much larger number of families were willing in 1971 to consider a child whose difficulty could not be corrected.

Family Composition: For only a small number of children (8 in 1969 and 13 in 1971) was a childless family considered the only desirable placement. Preference for a family with older children was more often designated than a family with younger children, a finding that is hardly surprising in view of the predominance of very young children among those registered. Considerable latitude in the type of family desired was indicated by the frequent checking of several types of family as appropriate for a particular child.

Less than a third of the adoptive families had no children in their homes -- 31% in 1969, 29% in 1971. Close to half had one or two children in the home, and about a fifth had three or more children.

Table 6

Physical Handicaps of Children Registered and Families Willing to Consider Handicapped Children

	1969		1971	
Handicap	No.	%	No.	%
None	178	80	302	77
Remediable - some expense	29	13	39	10
Remediable - considerable expense	2	1	5	1
Irremediable	12	5	42	11
Unknown	2	1	4	1
Total	223	100	392	100
Families willing to consider handicapped children:				
Remediable - some expense	85	40	314	39
Remediable - considerable expense	4	2	20	2
Irremediable	13	6	78	10

Obstacles to Placement

A few placements are made within a month of a child's registration with ARENA, and about a fourth are made within 3 months. Of the children registered in 1969 and not withdrawn, 25% were placed within the first 3 months, 30% between 3 and 6 months after registration, 21% between 6 and 12 months, and 11% after a lapse of a year or more. On April 1, 1972 there remained 22 children or 10% awaiting placement.

Comparable data for 1971 are available only for children placed within three months, 22% of the total. Fifty-six percent of the children had not been placed by the cut-off date, but over half of these had been registered less than 6 months.

Of the 22 children registered in 1969 and still awaiting placement more than 2 years later, none was registered before the age of 6 months and 11 were at least 5 years old at registration. Nineteen were males, and 16 were black. Seven were slow in intellectual development, and four had remediable physical handicaps.

In order to document a little more fully the characteristics of children for whom it is difficult to find adoptive homes, we compared the children who had and had not been placed within six months of registration. For this purpose we excluded 119 children not yet placed who were registered in 1971 less than six months before the cut-off date of data collection. These comparisons are given in Table 7.

The sex of the child does not appear to be a major factor in rapidity of placement. In 1969 about 60% of the children of both sexes were placed within six months. In 1971 this proportion held for the girls but less than half the boys were placed within this time period. Thus, the odds for early placement favored the girls in the latter year, but the two sexes had equal chances of early placement in 1969.

The data on age in Table 7 corroborate the impression that infants are very easy to place and older children relatively hard to place. In both years a very large proportion of the children under 1 year of age were placed within the first six months as were about half the children in the one to nine-year age range, but only a small proportion of those nine years or older.

In 1969 sibling groups took a little longer to place than individual children, but the difference was not great, and in 1971 being part of a sibling group seems to have presented no problem.

The figures in the table show dramatically the difficulty of placement of the child of all black background. Only 17% of the black children in the 1969 group were placed within six months, as compared with 79% of the Indian children and 50% of the white children. The children of white-black parentage did not fare much better, with only 32% placed early. In 1971 the picture improved slightly for the all black child, and very markedly for the child of white-black parentage of whom 68% were placed early.

Slow mental development was a slight obstacle to early placement in 1969 and a major obstacle in 1971, while the child with accelerated mental development was very likely to be placed within six months.

In both years children without physical handicaps had the highest proportion of early placements and those with irremediable handicaps had the lowest proportion. Efforts of ARENA staff to recruit families for handicapped children is reflected by a rise from 33% to 44% of the children with irremediable handicaps placed within six months.

Table 7

Characteristics of Children Placed and Not Placed Within Six Months of Registration

Characteristics	1969 Placed No.	1969 Placed %	1969 Not placed No.	1969 Not placed %	1971 Placed No.	1971 Placed %	1971 Not placed No.	1971 Not placed %
Total	131	59	92	41	143	52	130	48
Sex								
Male	85	59	64	41	80	48	87	52
Female	46	62	28	38	63	59	43	41
Age								
Under 1 year	49	80	12	20	50	76	16	21
1 to 5 years	48	56	38	44	44	52	40	48
5 to 9 years	29	55	24	45	31	44	39	56
9 years and older	5	22	18	78	18	34	35	66
Sibling group								
Yes	34	52	32	48	44	55	36	45
No	97	62	60	38	99	51	94	49
Race								
White	32	50	32	50	26	41	37	59
Black	4	17	19	83	15	24	47	76
White-Black	6	32	10	68	36	68	17	32
Indian	44	79	12	21	37	69	17	31
White-Indian	22	71	9	29	12	86	2	14
Other	23	70	10	30	17	63	10	37
Intellectual potential								
Slow	10	42	14	58	13	25	39	75
Average	105	58	75	42	112	57	85	43
Accelerated	10	83	2	17	15	71	6	29
Physical Handicap								
None	112	63	66	37	117	54	98	46
Remediable	14	45	17	55	14	48	15	52
Irremediable	4	33	8	67	12	44	15	56

We took a closer look at the 1971 group of 130 children who had been registered at least six months but not placed. They included 37 white children of whom 73% were male, 70% were 5 years of age or older, 57% were slow in intellectual handicaps, and 32% had irremediable physical handicaps. The 64 black or black-white children did not include a disproportion with intellectual or physical handicaps, but nearly half were at least 5 years

old. About three-fourths of the Indian and Indian-white children were at least 5 years old and were members of sibling groups.

The impediments of age, race, slow mental development and physical handicap do not, of course, necessarily come singly. We did not analyze further the overlap in these characteristics, but it seems safe to assume that the more of these characteristics a child has, the more difficult he is to place. Thus the older black child, the blace handicapped child, the older child with slow mental development are among those for whom it is most difficult to find a suitable adoptive home.

Although ARENA attempts to refer only children who meet the conditions the adoptive applicants set with respect to the type of child they will consider, a substantial number of children are not accepted on the first referral. Of the children in the 1969 study group, 33 were referred once but the record was returned to ARENA because the child's characteristics made him unsuitable for the family for whom he was referred, and 17 others were referred and returned from two to four times. The comparable figures for 1971 were 61 returned once and 17 returned more than once.

The reasons given for return of the child's record were as follows:

	1969	1971
Age	7	16
Race	10	9
Intellectual level	4	16
Sibling group	15	4
Physical handicap	6	8
Combination of above	6	9
Other	2	12
Not specified	-	4
	50	78

The greater problem of age and intellectual level in 1971 is probably associated with the greater proportion of older children and of "slow" children registered in that year. As the proportion of sibling groups referred in the two years was roughly comparable, the fact that fewer children were rejected on this basis in 1971 may reflect ARENA's success in recruiting families willing to accept such groups.

Characteristics of Adoptive Applicants

The 1971 adoptive applicants included more single-parent applicants than the 1969 group. The 1969 group included 208 two-parent families, six female-only applicants and one male-only applicant. The comparable figures for 1971 are 743, 57 and 5.

Data on the age, race, education and occupation of the adoptive applicants are shown in Tables 8-12. Scanning Table 8 will reveal a wide age range of applicants, with about half in the decade 30 and under 40 years. The men were slightly older than the women, and the 1969 applicants were slightly older than the 1971 group.

Comment has already been made on the race of the adoptive applicants. Nearly 90% of both women and men in both years were white. The 1971 group includes appreciably more black applicants than the 1969 group, but the number in 1971 was still very small in relation to the number of black children registered.

With respect to education, the range is wide. A little less than half the applicants had no more than a high school education, but a substantial proportion, especially of the men, had gone beyond college to graduate work.

Two-thirds of the women in the 1969 group and half those in the 1971 group reported their occupation as house wife. Most of the remainder were in professional or clerical occupations. About 40% of the men were in professional occupations, with managers and craftsmen the other major occupational groups.

Table 8

Age of Adoptive Applicants Registered

	Men				Women			
	1969		1971		1969		1971	
Age	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Under 30	29	14	150	20	61	28	256	32
30 and under 40	103	49	376	50	86	40	371	46
40 and under 50	56	27	183	24	52	24	145	18
50 and over	21	10	38	5	14	6	21	3
Unknown	-	-	6	1	1	*	7	1
Total	209	100	753	100	214	100	800	100
Median	37.3		36.0		35.3		33.9	

*Less than 0.5%

Table 9

Race of Adoptive Applicants Registered

Race	Men				Women			
	1969		1971		1969		1971	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
White	180	86	681	91	191	89	712	89
Black	4	2	27	4	4	2	28	3
Oriental	8	4	10	1	8	4	16	2
White-Indian	10	5	19	2	9	4	21	3
Other	7	3	16	2	2	1	23	3
Total	209	100	753	100	214	100	800	100

Table 10

Education of Adoptive Applicants Registered

Education	Men				Women			
	1969		1971		1969		1971	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Less than high school	28	13	79	10	33	15	68	8
High school	66	32	225	30	73	34	319	40
Some college	26	12	117	16	46	21	145	18
College	50	24	126	17	36	17	157	20
Graduate work	36	17	191	25	19	9	83	10
Unknown	3	1	15	2	7	3	28	4
Total	209	100	753	100	214	100	800	100

Table 11

Occupation of Women

Occupation	1969 No.	1969 %	1971 No.	1971 %
Housewife	138	64	411	51
Professional	37	17	147	18
Clerical	21	10	100	13
Other	7	3	45	6
Unknown	11	6	97	12
Total	214	100	800	100

Table 12

Occupation of Men

Occupation	1969 No.	1969 %	1971 No.	1971 %
Professional	79	38	321	43
Managers	30	14	119	16
Clerical	26	12	62	8
Craftsmen	33	16	101	13
Operatives	18	9	58	8
Service	4	2	20	3
Laborers	3	1	19	2
Armed Forces	6	3	24	3
Unknown	10	5	29	4
Total	209	100	753	100